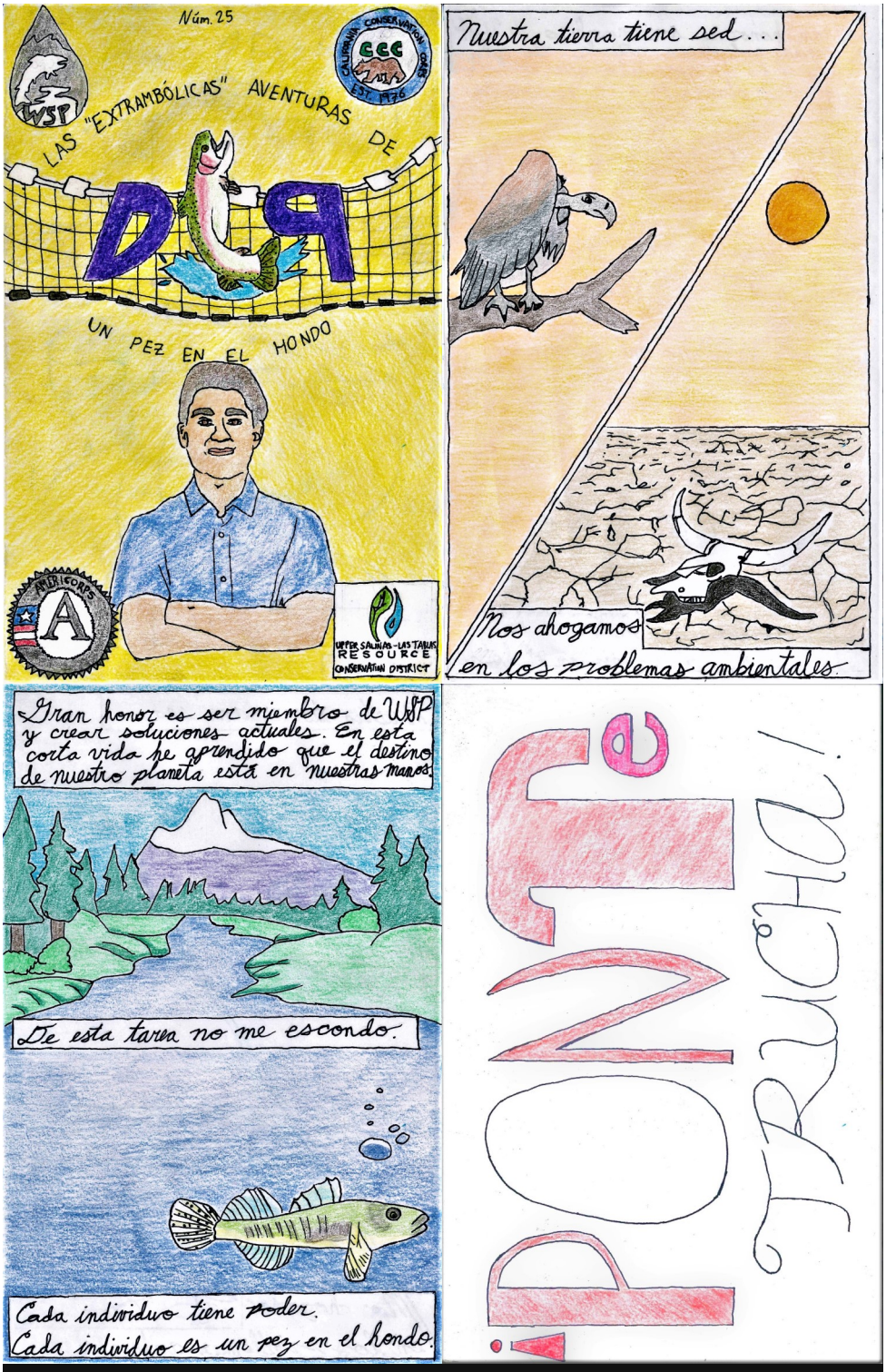
Volume 25, Issue 1

TRIBUTARY TRIBUNE

Stories and Art by Members of the California Conservation Corps Watershed Stewards Program, in partnership with AmeriCorps

Year 25, District D



Comic designed by Member David Lopez-Portillo of US-LT RCD.

"My comic comments on humanity's current situation. We are faced with overwhelming environmental problems. Sometimes the good fight can seem hopeless—like a single fish looking for answers in an infinite ocean. But at the end of the day, real solutions start with just a single fish! Thanks for reading!

- David Lopez-Portillo

Las "Extrambólicas" Aventuras de D.L.P. *Un Pez en el Hondo*

Translation

David Lopez-Portillo, Placed at Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District

Section 1: The "Outlandish" Adventures of D.L.P., One Fish in the Deep. "Extrambólicas" is actually a family inside joke, it isn't a real word. My grandfather once described one of his travels as "extrambólico" and my mom wouldn't let it go. Estrambótico, the closest word, translates to "outlandish".

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A program of the California Conservation Corps, WSP is one of the most productive programs for future employment in natural resources. WSP is administered by California Volunteers and sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Las "Extrambólicas" Aventuras de D.L.P.
Un Pez en el Hondo,
continued from page 1.

Section 2: Our land thirsts . . . yet we drown in environmental struggles.

Section 3: It is a great honor to be a WSP Member who creates and works on real solutions to some of these problems. In my short life I have learned that the fate of the planet is, without exaggeration, in our hands. I choose not to hide from this task. Every individual has the power to take action. Every individual is one fish in the deep.

Section 4: Be a trout! "Ponte trucha" is a common saying among Spanish-speakers. Essentially, this phrase means "look alive!" or "stay alert!"

In This Issue

The Land You Stand On

Maddy Luthard, Placed at Central Coast Wetlands Group

As Watershed Stewards, many of us moved from across the state, or even across the country, to engage in stewardship of ecosystems and watersheds that are not our own. Supplanted in a new community, ecologically we have two options: invade or naturalize. Take the highly invasive iceplant (*Carpobrotus spp.*) that has wreaked havoc on California's coast, causing dune collapse and displacing native species. In contrast, the California pepper tree (*Schinus molle*) was introduced from Peru and is now naturalized as a prominent member of the state's iconic and beneficial flora. Most of us are not native to the communities we serve, yet we aim to play such an important role in its conservation, restoration, and management. For me, this paradox begs the question: who stewarded this land before me?

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Members Maddy Luthard and Sara Galindo of CCWG service a bioreactor.

District D Members at Year 25 Orientation in Fortuna.

The Land You Stand On, continued from page 2.

Here in Monterey County, it is the Ohlone[1]. The Mutsun, Rumsen, and Esselen groups of Ohlone historically resided along the coast, setting a precedent of stewardship long before European contact and long before I began (carefully) tromping through the local waterways and uplands purporting my duty as a naturalized steward[2]. Before the term "environmentalism" existed, the Ohlone lived in symbiosis with the plants and animals of this region, their conscientious practices and thoughtful land use precluding a need for conservation; there is nothing to restore when you exist in harmony with your environment. The oak trees provided abundant acorns, the igneous rock of what is now designated as Pinnacles National Park provided a surface to grind acorns into flour, deergrass and Santa Barbara sedge provided materials for basket-weaving, and the Salinas River provided salmon[3]. This harmony was no accident. The Ohlone practiced careful management and intentional cultivation of the land around them, all while maintaining nature's balance. Like any native species, they occupied a unique niche and utilized the resources at their disposal to survive and to thrive.

Today, the pristine ecosystem in which Monterey's local Ohlone groups once prospered confronts new environmental challenges. Dubbed the "Salad Bowl of America," this area is faced with the daunting task of feeding our growing population. A changing ecosystem calls for a new harmony to be achieved, and much can be learned from the careful balance that the Ohlone understood and maintained before us. All of us must take on the responsibilities of thoughtful stewardship. Although I am not native to the area I aim to help conserve, I hope that recognizing the practices endemic to this community will allow me to naturalize rather than invade. I am working to be more intentional and conscientious in my stewardship, to honor the land I am standing on, and to acknowledge those who cared for it before me.

References:
1. Native-Land.ca. *Our Home on Native Land.* Retrieved from https://native-land.ca/maps/territories/ohlone. 10 Dec 2018.
2. Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. *Maps of Aboriginal Territory.* Retrieved from http://amahmutsun.org/history/history-sub-page. 11 Dec 2018.
3. Pinnacles National Park, National Park Service. *Native Peoples.* Retrieved from https://www.nps.gov/pinn/learn/historyculture/native-peoples.htm. 11 Dec 2018.

About the Watershed Stewards Program

Since 1994, the Watershed Stewards Program (WSP) has been engaged in comprehensive, community-based, watershed restoration and education throughout coastal California.

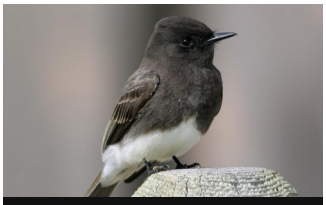
WSP was created in 1994 by California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) biologists, educators, and the California Conservation Corps to fill critical gaps in scientific data collection, in-stream restoration, and watershed education. In collaboration with landowners, tribal communities, teachers, community members, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies, WSP works to revitalize watersheds that contain endangered and threatened salmonid species (Chinook Salmon, Coho Salmon, and Steelhead Trout) by using state-of-the-art data collection and watershed restoration techniques. WSP also engages members in education, outreach, and volunteer recruitment efforts to increase the capacity of partner organizations. WSP currently has Members working from the Oregon border to the Santa Monica Mountains.

Stream Birds of Santa Barbara

Elizabeth Martin, Placed at Santa Barbara Steelhead Coalition

Spending most of my week outdoors is one of the greatest parts of my position as a WSP Member placed at the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. I walk creeks throughout Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties in order to identify barriers to fish passage, assess fish presence, and measure water quality. Learning about fish has been amazing, and what has made it even better is that I get to do my favorite hobby during the downtime: bird watching. The creeks that Steelhead Trout live in attract a huge array of birds that any keen-eyed person can spot. The following is a mini field guide to a few of my favorite birds.

Photos by The Cornell Lab of Ornithology



Black Phoebe

These black and white birds typically perch on low branches near water. They nimbly snatch insects from the air or water's surface before returning to the same branch. Black Phoebes feed almost exclusively on insects, so they have adaptations to make them expert fly catchers. Long wings and tail make them agile flyers, while a wide, flat beak surrounded by bug-sensing whiskers increases their accuracy.

If you spot one of these little birds, don't look away! Chances are, it will be gone by the time you look back. Ruby-crowned Kinglets are constantly on the move, flying among the trees and shrubs on streambanks, catching insects. Hidden under their forehead feathers is a bright red "crown" of feathers, used for mate attraction and territory defense.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Belted Kingfisher.

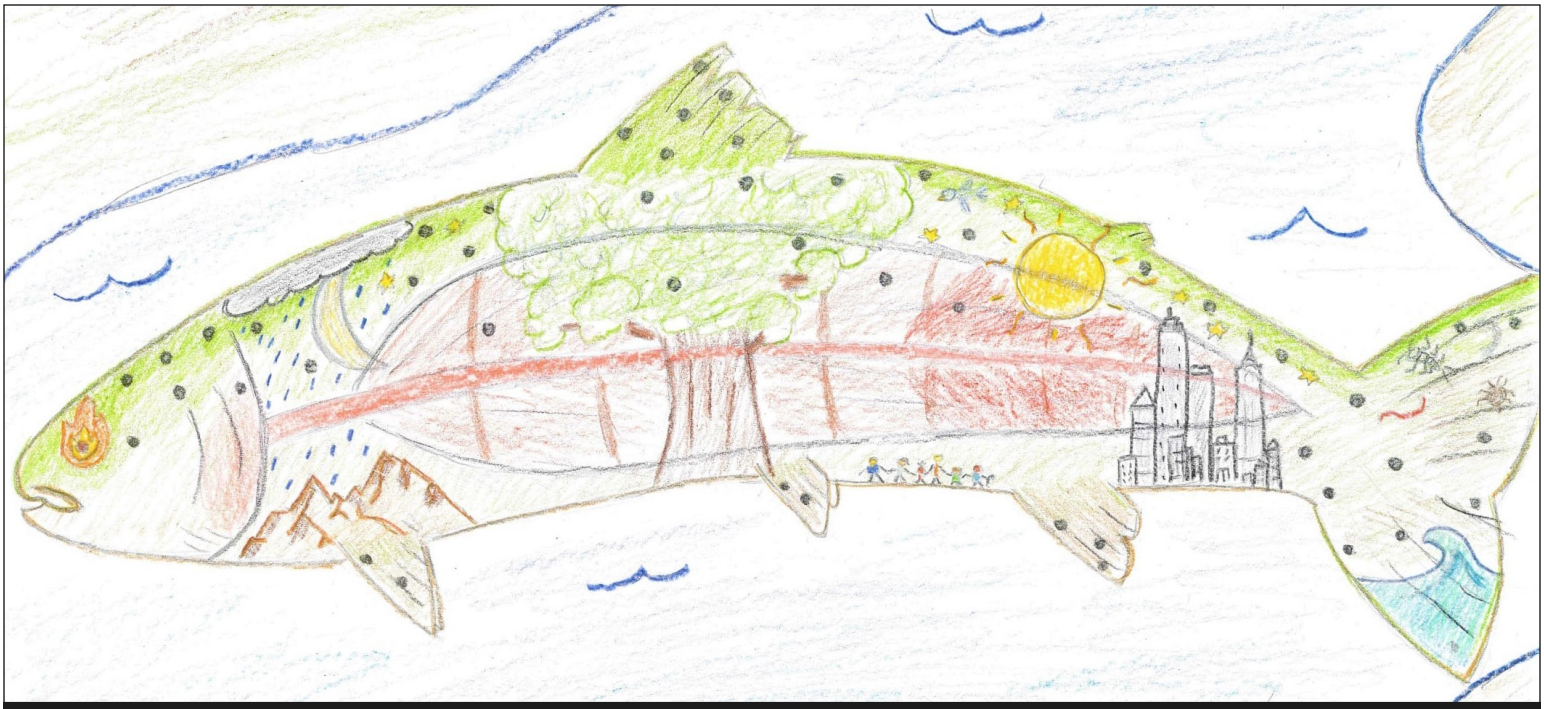
There is no mistaking Belted Kingfishers! They have distinctive crested heads, a large beak for catching fish, and a band of dark feathers across their chest. Belted Kingfishers eat mostly small fish, including young trout, and nest in burrows on the banks up to eight feet deep.

In their spring plumage, Yellow-rumped Warblers are a sight to behold. They are streaked with vibrant yellow patches on their chin, forehead, underwings, chest, and rump. From the stream, you will see these birds foraging in large groups, eating berries or bugs on the streambank vegetation.

Yellow-rumped Warbler

Acorn Woodpecker

Acorn Woodpeckers store food in the trunks of oaks and sycamores that line streams. They have three white patches (two on their wings and one on their rump) that are easily visible as they crisscross the creek flying between trees.



Drawing by Member Jelly Kahler of SMM RCD.

Steelhead Symmetry

Jelly Kahler, Placed at the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains

This steelhead portrayal represents the interdisciplinary nature of my placement with the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCD SMM). So far, while serving with the RCD, I've become privy to an estranged relationship between the city of Los Angeles and its surrounding wildlands. I think with so many locals feeling far removed from wildlands, people are no longer connecting with nature in an authentic way. In the case of the recent Woolsey and Hill fires that ravaged the Santa Monica Mountains, urban environments have perhaps become too embedded within wildlands, and unfamiliar human interruption has created chaos and devastation.

I feel balance is the key to a successful relationship between L.A. natives and their fragile surrounding ecosystem. The images I drew within this steelhead illustrate how complicated I feel this balance can be to maintain. I've listed each element below, see if you can find them within the steelhead!

L.A.'s Skyline

Without a city that cares and invests in nature, our fish stand no chance of longevity.

The Sun and Moon

These symbolize the hope that high tides will help lagoons to breach so steelhead can make it to and from the ocean.

Fire

Fire is a natural and potentially dangerous element of California's wildlands and we must work to better understand its process.

Feather

This represents the special relationship Native Americans have with steelhead. This fish bears a brownish red feather, indicating it's been wounded in a fight for survival. Faint lines cut across the feather, like an eagle's. The eagle feather is only gifted to those Native Americans that have shown the highest honor and bravery.

Humans

We need to work together so that we might restore this incredible species to Southern California streams!

Oak Tree

Trees not only recharge dry groundwater tables to enhance water availability in our streams, but also purify air and water quality as particulates from the air dissolve into creeks. Leaf litter from trees provides valuable nutrients to macroinvertebrate communities, and trees shade creeks which moderates water temperatures in ever-warming stream systems.

Bird

A variety of birds indicate healthy shorelines and estuaries.

Rain

Rain provides water that Southern California drought laden streams desperately crave.

Macroinvertebrates

A variety of macroinvertebrates indicate healthier streams and provide juvenile steelhead with vital sustenance.

The Ocean

Steelhead explore the vast expanse of the ocean for a large portion of their adult lives.

A bio-retention basin at the CCC's Los Padres Center. Photo by Member Doug Platt of SLO SI.

Bio-retention Basins

These structures begin the infiltration and treatment of excess water during storm events. Bio-retention basins are vegetated depressions in the ground that help to slow, spread, and sink runoff. They can range from small gardens on a person's property to large areas with special soils and drainage that favors water infiltration into the ground. Not only do they help put water back into the land, but they also maintain water quality in our creeks by removing fine sediment and absorbing pollutants accumulated in storm water. Not to mention, they can be aesthetically pleasing decorations for any yard or business!

Greywater Systems

Greywater is the "waste" water that our showers, bathroom sinks, and laundry facilities produce. The water is gently used and, provided the correct detergent and soaps are used, can be recycled without any chemical treatment. Instead of sending this water into the sewer system, it can be utilized to irrigate crops, lawns, and gardens. This helps reduce the impact of pumping water from our aquifers or creeks and maintaining water levels for fish during dry periods throughout the year.

Our Fair Share: Giving Back Through Low Impact Development

Doug Platt, Placed at San Luis Obispo Steelhead Initiative

Of all the resources Steelhead Trout need to survive, the most vital is also in the highest demand here in California's Central Coast: water. Through development of impervious surfaces and agricultural usage, human disturbance has deeply affected the hydrology in this increasingly arid region. Impervious surfaces such as asphalt and concrete disrupt the infiltration of rainwater into the ground and lead to destructive flows from excess runoff during storm events and lower streamflow during dry months. When it comes to storm water, watershed-minded folk repeat the mantra, "slow it, spread it, sink it!" Retaining water on the land, rather than sending it down the storm drain, is the most crucial step we can take to keep water in the creek for our ever-thirsty steelhead. Low Impact Development (LID) projects reduce our effect on the hydrologic system by mimicking natural processes. The following LID practices are present at my Placement Site at the Los Padres California Conservation Corps center. I suggest you get outside and identify these structures in your community, or do some research and see if you can implement LID practices at your own home!

The greywater system attached to a laundry room at the CCC's Los Padres Center. Photo by Doug Platt.

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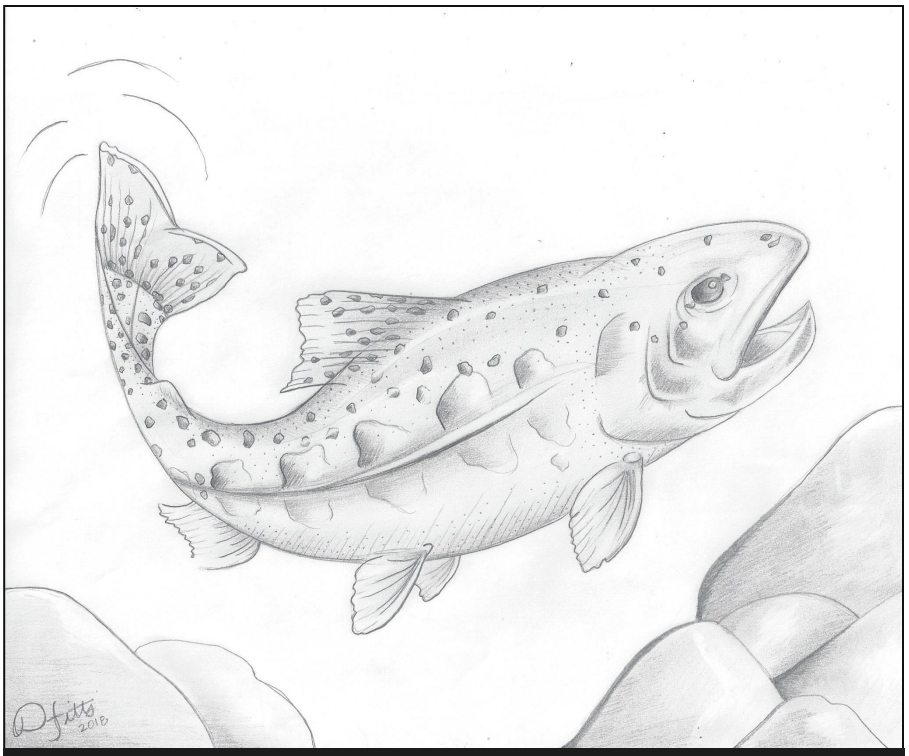
Our Fair Share, continued from page 6.

Rainwater Capture

Roofs are permanent impervious surfaces that, ideally, remain impervious for our own comfort. These are actually the perfect locations for rainwater capture! By collecting and storing water that falls on roofs during storm events, we can decrease the amount of water taken from creeks for watering plants and livestock. By capturing this water during the wet season we can "make the good times last" by subsequently using this stored water during the dry season. Roofs can capture A LOT of rainwater rapidly. For example, if a storm drops three inches of rain onto a 1,000 square foot roof, we can collect over 1,800 gallons of water. This means we are keeping 1,800 gallons of water in the creeks, providing our precious steelhead with valuable habitat to seek refuge in during those dry months of the year.

Rainwater capture barrels at the CCC's Los Padres Center. Photo by Doug Platt.



Drawing of a Steelhead Trout by Member Danielle Fitts of SBSC.

How Service Changed Me

Danielle Fitts, Placed at Santa Barbara Steelhead Coalition

As I reflect on my past year with WSP, I realize how much my perspective on service has changed. Before, I was skeptical of my own abilities, skeptical of other people, and skeptical of the world itself. It wasn't until I chose to move my life across the country and join this amazing group of like-minded, passionate individuals that my views changed.

I saw Members suffer personal loss, endure freezing temperatures, sustain injuries, and work twelve-hour days or six-day weeks. I saw Members plan events in which hundreds of volunteers attended and change the lives of countless students through education. I saw Members wow people with their art and bring people to tears with their words. I saw Members struggle and I saw Members thrive. But most importantly, I saw Members smile. Through all their hard work and long days, I always saw them smile.

Their smiles, this passion, that drive. Because of this, I was no longer skeptical of my own abilities or the world. Because of this, I now see the power one person can hold and the difference one person can truly make.

The Mystery of Morro Bay:
Assisting with Eelgrass Monitoring Efforts

Melia Green, Placed at San Luis Obispo Steelhead Initiative

As the tides fall to their lowest, we step into our waders alongside staff and volunteer members of the Morro Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP), preparing to survey the eelgrass transects in Morro Bay. Our journey typically begins in the mudflats of the back bay, where our boots sink deeper with every step, and our tropical-themed foam body boards become even more of an asset in holding us up. Falling is likely, even for the most coordinated, and leaving covered in mud is guaranteed. However, when we are lucky enough to have the low tide coincide with the sunset, we get to watch the sun slowly fall behind Morro Rock as we complete our counting.

Eelgrass *(Zostera marina)* is a marine flowering plant that can be found in coastal habitats worldwide. It provides many ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, sediment accretion and stabilization, and water purification. It can also provide critical foundational habitat for invertebrate and fish species[1].

Monitoring the eelgrass of Morro Bay, when the tides allow it, is critical. While a decline in eelgrass worldwide has been observed, the case of Morro Bay is a bit of a mystery. Aerial Mapping has shown that eelgrass acreage has dropped from 344 acres in 2007 to 13.25 acres in 2017, decreasing by more than 90% over 10 years[1]. Though this decline has driven a number of restoration and research efforts in the area, pinpointing the exact cause has proven difficult due to the plants sensitivity to a number of factors. These include natural impacts such as changes in salinity, turbidity, and herbivory or anthropogenic impacts such as nonpoint source pollution from the connected watersheds or dredging at the mouth of the bay[1].

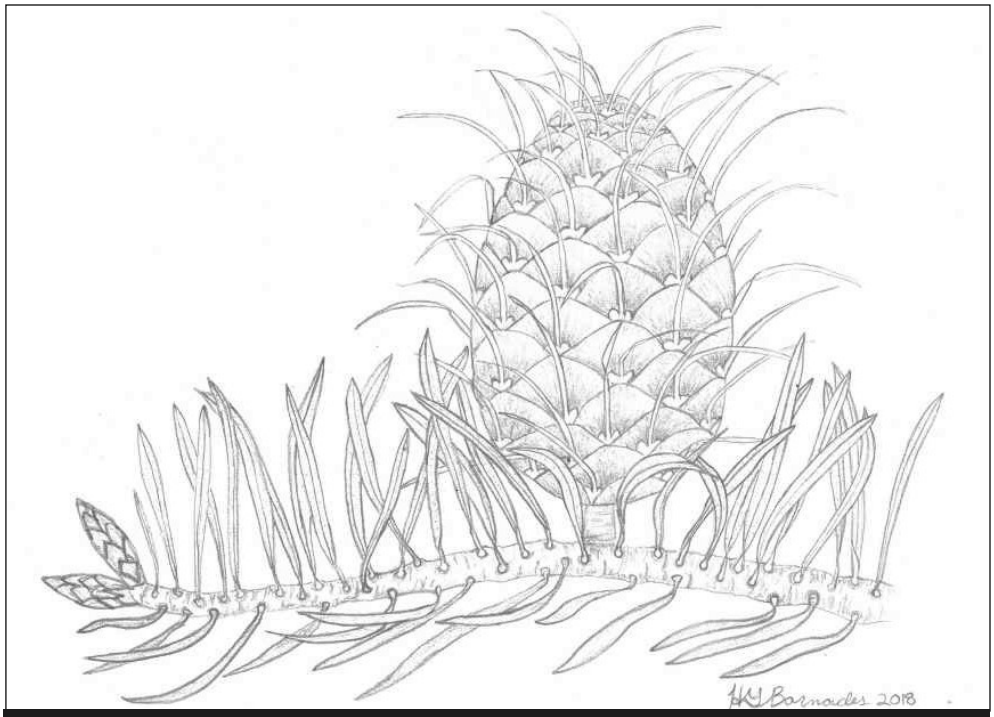
When assisting the MBNEP in its monitoring efforts, we follow relatively simple procedures. Locating the small field markers for each of the plots or transects under the dense matts of long leaves can be the hardest part. Using a quadrat, we assess cover density, count shoots, and measure blade lengths at each transect or plot. All that follows is a race against the incoming tides.

References:

1. Morro Bay National Estuary Program. *Morro Bay Eelgrass Report 2017.* 2018.

San Luis Obispo Steelhead Initiative Members Melia Green and Doug Platt monitoring Eelgrass at Coleman Beach in Morro Bay with MBNEP staff, including WSP alumni and current Mentor Karissa Willits.

Members Hayley Barnes and Emmy Anzalone of CDFW Big Sur at Big Sur



Drawing of the Santa Lucia fir (Abies bracteata) ovulate cone. Illustrated by Member Hayley Barnes of CDFW Big Sur.

The Embellished Fir

Hayley Barnes, Placed at CDFW Big Sur

The Big Sur Coast hosts impressive ocean views with the dramatic cliffs of the Santa Lucia Mountains that rise out of the earth. Highway One, wilderness, waterfalls and redwoods cohabitate in this magical space. The watersheds are comprised of steep hills with deep canyons and valleys that harbor creeks and rivers which bear Steelhead Trout, the muse of the Department of Fish and Wildlife Big Sur site. This steep terrain provides diverse habitats, a mix of highly productive conifer forests of Northern California with chaparral and oak woodlands of Southern and Central California[1]. Additionally, this unique climate and topography provides suitable conditions for the rarest and arguably most unusual fir species in North America: the Santa Lucia fir, *Abies bracteata*[2].

Once widespread, *A. bracteata* is now endemic to the Lucia Mountains and limited to steep slopes or moist canyon bottoms within 13 miles of the coast[3]. The steep, typically north-facing slopes, provide cool wet microclimates that are sparsely vegetated and less vulnerable to fire[4]. This limited range makes it difficult to observe the peculiar groves of *A. bracteata*. Mature trees are conical with spire-like crowns that reach up to about 30 meters (100 feet) and shoot out of the hillside: a Dr. Seuss-meets-European-Alps hillside aesthetic[2]. Like the cliffs that succumb to gravity in the form of landslide, *A. bracteata's* branches are drawn down drastically, reaching the base of the tree. Additionally, the limbs are highly branched with comically long drooping branchlets that resemble dreadlocks. The strange and exaggerated nature of the fir extends to all features. For example, the cones found at the crown of the tree sit upright and have long papery bracts, lending to *A. bracteata's* other common name: the bristlecone fir[5].

A. bracteata is scarce and off the beaten path, making it unknown to many. Even when researching plants of the area, it seldom makes the cut onto local plant lists. However, this unique and embellished tree deserves observation and conservation. During my term serving with WSP, I remain hopeful that I will come across one of these regal beauties deep in the canyons of Big Sur's watersheds. The Santa Lucia fir is art imitating life in its own special habitat in Big Sur.

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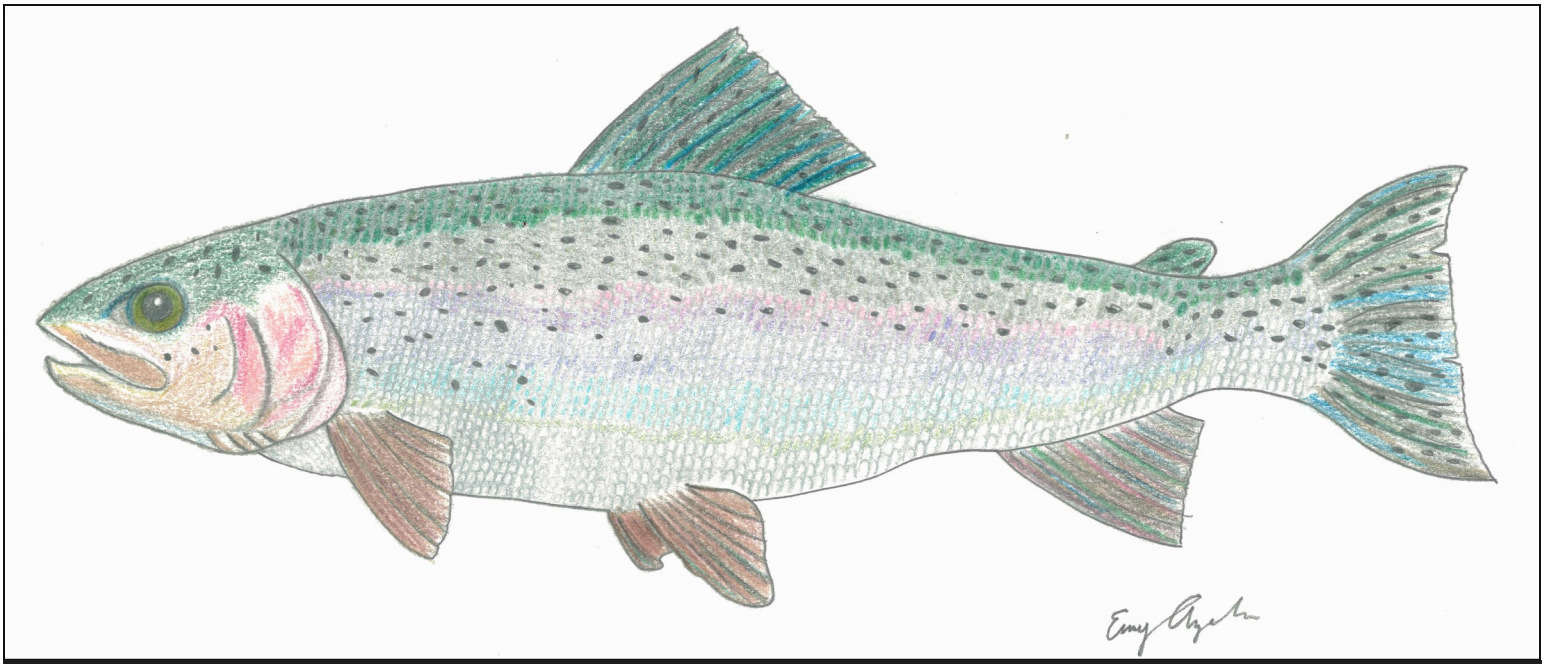
1. State of California, Natural Resources Agency, Department of Fish and Game. *Fish Bulletin 180, California Coastal Salmonid Population Monitoring: Strategy Design and Methods*, 2011.
2. Rogers, David. "Perfect Pattern of Silvan Perfection on the Symmetrical Plan, the Rare Santa Lucia Fir." The Double-Cone Quarterly, vol. I, no. 2, 1998. http://www.ventanawild.org/news/fe98/slfirs.html. Accessed 8 Dec. 2018.
3. "Santa Lucia Fir." *Los Padres Forest Watch*. https://lpfw.org/our-region/wildlife/santa-lucia-fir/ Accessed 7 Dec. 2018.
4. "Abies bracteata." *The Gymnosperm Database*. 29 Dec. 2017, https://www.conifers.org/pi/Abies_bracteata.php Accessed 10 Dec. 2018.
5. Stuart, D. John, and John O. Sawyer. *Trees and Shrubs of California*. University of California, Ltd, 1997.



Drawing by Member Emmy Anzalone of CDFW Big Sur.

The Most Impressive Salmonid: A Trout

Emmy Anzalone, Placed at CDFW Big Sur

During my interview with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), I asked my future Mentors what salmon species were in Big Sur. Expecting to hear familiar names like chinook and coho, I instead received the response, "We actually don't have salmon here – we have Steelhead Trout, which are way cooler than salmon." Since then, I've had the opportunity to work with the threatened South-Central California Coast Steelhead, and have gained a newfound respect for this incredibly unique and resilient fish.

Steelhead Trout are impressive due to their unique traits: unlike salmon, they are iteroparous and selectively-anadromous. Salmon are anadromous, meaning they are born in freshwater, migrate to the ocean, and return to their natal stream to spawn. On the contrary, steelhead are not always anadromous – they can spend their entire lives in freshwater, in which case they are referred to as "residents", or rainbow trout[1]. Rainbow trout and steelhead are genetically indistinguishable - both are the species *Oncorhynchus mykiss* (*O. mykiss*). **Parental life-history does not determine the life-history pattern of a steelhead or trout. This means that the offspring of two rainbow trout might decide to migrate to the sea and become a steelhead, and vice-versa[1]. Another distinguishing characteristic of** *O. mykiss* **is that they are iteroparous, meaning that they have the ability to spawn multiple times before dying[2]. This characteristic is also not determined by whether or not a steelhead's parents spawned more than once.**

In my opinion, the most impressive quality of steelhead is not their unique life-history patterns but their ability to live in the arid environments of California's Central Coast and Southern California. While electrofishing a short reach (less than a kilometer) of San Luis Obispo Creek with CDFW, we found 139 *O. mykiss*. **This urban stream is only about two meters wide on average, and meanders through the heart of San Luis Obispo. I find it remarkable that these fish can survive in this environment, given their drastically different habitat in places such as the broad rivers and lush forests of the Pacific Northwest. Monitoring** *O. mykiss* **in the modest creeks of the Central Coast has directly shown me the resilience of this unique salmonid. My growing respect for steelhead has further inspired me to help conserve and restore the watersheds that we both call home.**

References:

1. Kendall, N., McMillan, J., Sloat, M., Buehrens, T., Quinn, T., Pess, G., Kuzishchin, K., McClure, M., Zabel, R. (2014). *Anadromy and residency in steelhead and rainbow trout (Oncorhynchus mykiss): a review of the process and patterns.* Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences. http://www.nrcresearchpress.com/doi/full/10.1139/cjfas-2014-0192#.XBJ5CVxKjcs Accessed 10 Dec. 2018.
2. Quinn, T. (2005). *The Behavior and Ecology of Pacific Salmon and Trout.* 1st ed. Canada: University of Washington Press, pp.19-20.

Wholeness

Maya Vavra, Placed at WSP San Luis Obispo

To me, Steelhead Trout represent the connectedness of all species and habitats. For this block print, I drew inspiration from the *ouroboros* symbol, which represents wholeness and the cyclic nature of life and death. Steelhead are born in freshwater, migrate to saltwater, and return to their natal stream to spawn. They can survive spawning and return seasonally to repeat this process. An unhealthy creek will disrupt this lifecycle, so we can use steelhead population health as an indicator of the health of the creek and ecosystem as a whole. Steelhead connect our oceans with our streams, and are a foundation of our watershed!

Here in San Luis Obispo County, Chorro Creek flows into the Morro Bay Estuary. This steelhead habitat is one of my favorite places and inspired the landscape at the center of this print. I feel fortunate to be placed in San Luis Obispo, where we have the opportunity to apply WSP's mission in this beautiful landscape and restore our precious populations of Steelhead Trout!

Block print created by Team Leader Maya Vavra of WSP SLO. Maya carved linoleum, applied ink to the carving, and printed the image onto paper to create this final product.

Common Ground

Sal Zaragoza, Placed at Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Reource Conservation District

I recently learned a lesson about the importance of keeping an open mind with regard to our perceptions of environmental issues and their causes. In the field of environmentalism, sources of environmental degradation can often be traced back to particular industries, especially agriculture. As a major contributor to water quality degradation, the agricultural industry is often perceived negatively through discourse among those in the environmental community. However, promoting a negative perception of agriculture can lead to relationships in which farmers distrust environmental resource agencies, leaving resource managers without critical partnerships. An important step for environmentalists is to look beyond the environmental issues to find common ground with industries in order to foster better relationships, eliminate negative perceptions, and encourage understanding. When I took a seasonal position with a vineyard management company, I was fortunate to have an experience that allowed me to practice this idea and grow as an individual.

In fall of 2018, I had the opportunity to participate in harvesting wine grapes throughout the Central California

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Common Ground,
continued from page 11.

Coast. I operated tractors and hauled trailers loaded with fruit. I drove slowly through each vine row as a small crew of about ten farm workers hand-picked grapes and loaded them into the fruit bins. The bins weighed 4,000 pounds when fully loaded and the crew was capable of completing four full loads in one day. In other words, a mere ten people harvested 16,000 pounds of fruit in a typical day. After meeting those who work in this industry, I learned that this same level of effort occurs on most agricultural operations.

As I crawled into bed at night, exhausted after a 14-hour work day, I realized that, regardless of its environmental impacts, I had taken agriculture for granted. It is extremely hard work to grow food, yet it is easy to access produce at grocery stores. Producing food often requires hard physical labor and, admittedly, negative impact to the environment. As those who benefit from this process, we are all burdened with the impacts from this industry as much as the industry itself is. This is an example of finding common ground, and perceiving an industry with an understanding beyond the environmental issues it is associated with. When relationships with industries are built on mutual understanding, lasting partnerships can form and the road to addressing environmental degradation becomes clearer.

Member Sal Zaragoza of US-LT RCD holding a Steelhead Trout.

WSP Alumni Evelyn Barajas-Perez outside her office at the Morro Bay National Estuary Program.

Alumni Spotlight: Evelyn Barajas-Perez

WSP Member Years 23 & 24
CCC Corpsmember following Year 24
Interview by Maya Vavra

What was your WSP Member experience like?

My first year, I was placed in Fresno where there isn't much environmental education available. In that sense, I felt like I was a lot of help as a WSP Member. It was a privilege to teach kids about the massive San Joaquin River. Many didn't even realize it existed! That first year was also a transition into a lot of manual labor – I had never done manual labor! I had this sad idea embedded within me that I was not as capable at manual labor as my male coworkers. I definitely overcame that.

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Alumni Spotlight, continued from page 12.

I served my second WSP term in San Luis Obispo. I had a powerhouse team of Mentors! Three of my Mentors were strong, powerful women role models. But during this year I also became acutely aware of the lack of diversity in the environmental field. As a Mexican, I felt like I stood out like a sore thumb. After this realization, I did my research and wrote Cactus Garden – my own Tributary Tribune submission addressing this issue.

Was there one experience that was especially memorable? Why?

My site partner Tim and I were doing a spawner survey on a pretty normal day, or so it seemed. The water level was a little higher than we were used to, so miscalculations were made. Tim lost his footing, and I tried to help him, but it was too late! He had flooded his waders. We later realized his phone had been in his front pocket, which was now broken, and I had not brought my phone. We had no way to call our Mentor to pick us up!

Within 30 minutes, our Mentor realized something was off and came to our rescue. This is my favorite memory because I was so lucky to have a site partner like Tim to deal with this mishap. I sat there happy and smiling regardless of being cold and tired.

What are your title and responsibilities at your current job?

I am a Communications and Outreach Specialist with the Morro Bay National Estuary Program. I get to work with amazing groups in the area! I am currently collaborating with Girl Scouts, SLOPE (San Luis Outdoor Painters for the Environment), and Central Coast Women for Fisheries on various projects. It feels like a lot of my position is up in the air, I get to choose what I focus on any given day. My supervisors are very receptive to my ideas and interests! But, today is literally day-four of my job, so I'll keep you updated.

I'm excited about this position because it will get me back into the classroom! It is a goal of mine to volunteer with after-school programs in which the students and their parents speak primarily Spanish. This puts me on the right track to excel in that setting.

What advice would you give current WSP Members?

Dive in! I can't say it enough, just dive in and don't resist any opportunities! A lot of people are really uncomfortable with the idea of completing a WAP and WOW!, I know I was. But now I am so grateful that these were requirements of WSP. The experiences you are anxious about are like broccoli – you may not want to eat it, but it's really good for you and it will help you grow!

What is an interesting fact about yourself?

I dance a lot! Salsa, merengue, bachata – all the Latin dances. A lot of people are really surprised by this because the stereotypical "environmentalist" is a hippy and not a glitzy salsa dancer. I enjoy letting people into my world and breaking stereotypes. It's important to make an effort to reach people environmentally in unexpected places.

The Last Trout of North Fork

Danielle Fitts, Placed at Santa Barbara Steelhead Coalition

After such a fiery destruction
And almost no hope of recuperation

One lonely fish is left
A single trout so deft

Hidden deep in a man-made dam
For shelter he swam

Through all the flames
He remained mighty and tame

To be found a year later
There didn't seem to be anything greater

This one lonely trout
Has raised hope for this species, no doubt.

Member Sara Galindo of CCWG building a green house to be installed at Castroville Elementary School.

The Collab

Sara Galindo, Placed at Central Coast Wetlands Group

Do you see it? Feel it? Sense it?
In the seams of our existence?
Collaboration.
Mother Earth and her persistence.

A silent observer looking through the lens,
Sees the infinite connections.
Microorganisms, insects, fish, bird, mammal
Flora and water, a perfect example.
Collaboration.

Now with that same lens
Look around you.
That same infinity holding humanity together like glue.

At first glance, it may appear we've lost our way.
Look again.

Collaboration comes in all forms,
Vital to our existence.
As above, so below.
Remember Mother Nature, strive to match her persistence.

As we move and grow through this experience,
be sure to observe your mentors.
The Key: partnerships.
Geologist, biologist, regulators, inventors.
Each opens the space for ideas to exist.

Collaboration is the key as we look to the future.

Ten years from now, I will need your help.
Habitat enhancement, rainwater catchment,
program development, collaboration for advancement.
Geospatial engineering, land acquisition,
We'll work together, form a coalition.

Mother Nature, and her persistence
She will fight on, which side will you be on?

We'll need each other.

You are nothing without I,
I am nothing without we,
We are nothing without them,
And they are nothing without me.

Everyone has their niche to fill.
Collaboration and the people's will.

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Find out more about the program on our website:
ccc.ca.gov/watershed-stewards-program/

Our Mission

The Watershed Stewards Program's (WSP) mission is to conserve, restore, and enhance anadromous watersheds for future generations by linking education with high quality scientific practices.

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Become a WSP Member! Learn more about the program and find our application at: ccc.ca.gov/watershed-stewards-program/